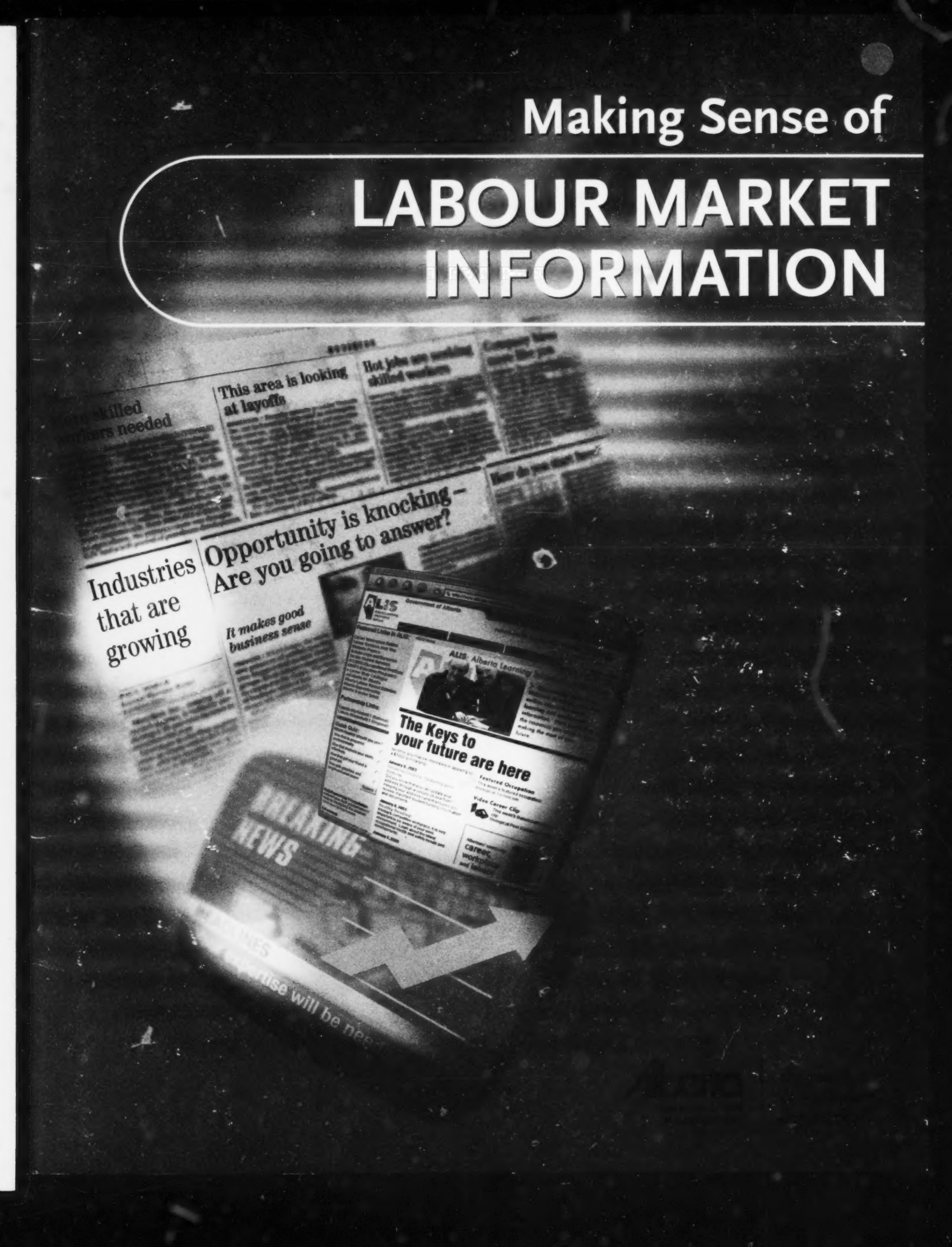
Making Sense of

LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION


This area is looking at layoffs
Industries that are growing
Opportunity is knocking – Are you going to answer?
It makes good business sense
ALIS
ALIS: Alberta Learning
The Keys to your future are here
BREAKING NEWS

This book is written for people making decisions about their futures. It will help you understand the value of using labour market information to make informed choices. It will help you:

- understand how information about yourself and about the world of work is important to your planning
- evaluate the impact of demographics, technological change and globalization on work and learning opportunities
- use career information resources to learn about the realities and requirements of various work roles
- explore various sources of information
- understand how to assess the reliability of labour market information
- connect with further information and resources.

This publication is available on-line through the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website – Alberta's leading on-line source for career, learning and employment information. To access this and additional publications, visit **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop**

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This information was accurate, to the best of our knowledge, at the time of printing. Labour market information and educational programs are subject to change, and you are encouraged to confirm with additional sources of information when making career, education and employment decisions.

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Making Sense of Labour Market Information

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Introduction

Career choices are important. They affect our lives and our families. For this reason we want to make the most informed decisions we can. We make good choices when we:

- have a thorough understanding of who we are and what we want in our work and life
- take the time to gather accurate, up-to-date labour market information
- combine and apply information about ourselves and the labour market in creative ways.

A quick overview of these steps is listed below. Although this book focuses on how to gather labour market information, knowledge of the other steps will help you better apply the information you find to your individual career plan.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment means taking stock of your values, interests and skills. A detailed self-assessment makes your career choices clearer. You can add new skills and experiences to your list and review changes in your values or interests that may affect your career path.

Before you go any further with learning about labour market information (LMI), you may want to spend some time assessing yourself. There is no single "test" that will tell you exactly what you should do, but there are a variety of print and electronic resources available to help you assess who you are and what you want.

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Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE) produces a variety of publications to assist you with career planning. Check out the following resources at your local AHRE service centre or view them on-line on the ALIS website at **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop**

- Career Planner: Choosing an occupation
- Multiple Choices: Planning your career for the 21st century
- Radical Change In the World of Work: The workbook
- Skills Plus Handbook: Discovering your personal career assets

The ALIS website also features links to interactive career planning tools. Click on "Career Planning Tools" under "Career" on the ALIS homepage at **www.alis.gov.ab.ca**

See the Resource section at the end of this book for more information and help with career planning.

Labour market information

Labour market information is the information you need to make decisions about your future. It includes information about planning your career, occupational options, types of training and learning opportunities and where to get training. It also includes information about the current labour market environment, as well as trends and forecasts about the future.

For example, labour market information could be information about what types of companies are hiring or downsizing. You can use that information to decide which occupations have good employment prospects now and in the future.

There are many sources of labour market information. Sometimes you don't even have to look for labour market information because it is right in front of you. Developing the skills needed to recognize labour market information gives you an advantage when making career, learning and employment decisions.

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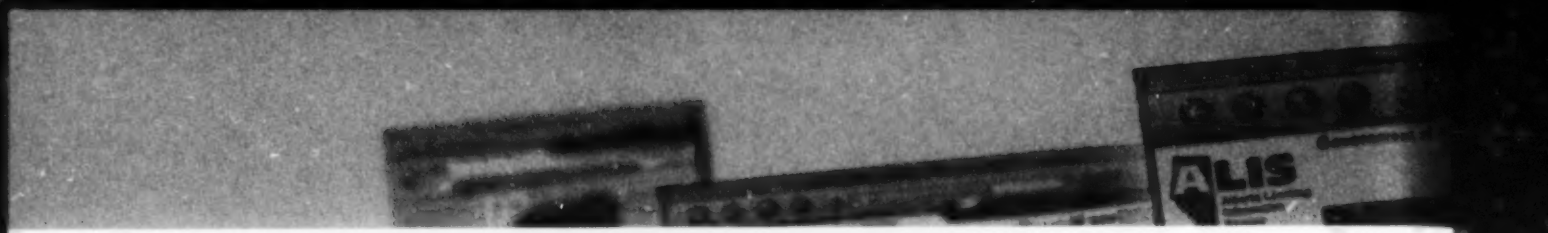

Putting it all together

Once you have a better understanding of what you have to offer, labour market information can help you match your preferences to the world of work. It can also help to double-check your assumptions about work options. It would be nice to have a crystal ball to tell you that your chosen occupation will always be available to you. In reality, however, there is no such thing as a sure bet. Using labour market information will help you make the best decision that you can at the time with the information that is available to you. Your best insurance against the ups and downs in the labour market is to prepare yourself with a variety of skills so that you can be flexible and adapt to changes.

Rob was a teacher who decided to pursue his dream of becoming a doctor. After completing one year of a science degree, he decided that he didn't want to spend the next eight years in university before returning to work. He knew that he had the skills, interests and aptitude to work in the health care field, so he looked for another occupation that fit these criteria.

He gathered labour market information by talking to friends and doing some research using the ALIS website. He discovered that there was a demand for nuclear medicine technologists and the training was only two years long. Rob then conducted an informational interview with someone working in the field to confirm this information. He found nuclear medicine met his criteria

- work in the health care field
- short-term training (two years)
- positive outlook for employment upon graduation.

Knowing himself and using labour market information helped Rob adapt and make positive decisions about his future even as his preferences and information about the labour market changed.

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Why Do I Need Labour Market Information?

Labour market information is important because the world is changing all the time. No one has all the answers about the future. You won't find a career counsellor who will tell you that "You should become a _____ because you'll be happy and guaranteed employment for the rest of your life." Understanding and interpreting labour market information is the best tool to help you with your decisions. Making sense of labour market information will give you an advantage. It will allow you to:

Recognize the right kind of information that will help you develop your career plan
There is a lot of information out there. Not everything you'll find will be relevant to your decision-making. Knowing how to look for labour market information will help you focus on the most relevant pieces of information that will help you on your path.

Make informed decisions about choosing an occupation
If you are going to spend your time and money preparing for an occupation, it is worthwhile to first do some research. What is a typical day on the job like? Is this field expanding? Will you like doing this sort of work?

Identify sources of training and education
There are many public and private institutions offering education and training. Choosing a program and a learning institution is just like any other purchase—you will want to be a wise consumer. You will want to find out:

- what training credentials employers are looking for
- which schools offer programs that suit your career goal
- answers to more specific questions to know if the school is right for you.

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Conduct a focused job search

Labour market information can help you to tap into the "hidden job market"—that is the 80 per cent of jobs that aren't advertised. You've probably heard people using this term all the time. It sounds like some sort of secret way of finding a job.

Tapping into the hidden job market is nothing more than developing the skills to recognize and make sense of labour market information, then doing something with that knowledge so you benefit from it. That can be something as simple as applying for a job at the right time or taking steps to pick up new job skills based on the knowledge that labour market information has given you.

Gathering Labour Market Information — Getting Started

Labour market information can be broad or quite specific. Understanding several factors (demographics, technological change and globalization) helps you anticipate the types of skills that will be needed in future. It will also help you avoid disappearing jobs. If you want to be able to anticipate which direction to take in your career plan, you must be aware of major labour market influences that can have an impact on you. Some of these influences are outlined here.

Demographics

Demographics are characteristics of a population, in this case the population of Alberta. Demographics include such things as average age, population size, growth, density, distribution and vital statistics.

For example, Alberta has a relatively young population, but it is aging. The first members of the "baby boomers" group, that large number of people born between 1945 and 1966, are moving into their mid-50s and are beginning to retire. The major impact of this trend on the labour force will likely be felt after 2011.

How does this kind of information help you make a decision about your future?

- It indicates future openings in occupations from which baby boomers are retiring.
- Looking at the broader issue of an aging population and the goods and services that will likely be needed by these individuals, demand for workers to meet those needs is also increasing. Services directed at seniors could have major implications for the housing, financial services, tourism, accommodation, and food and beverage industries.

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Technological change

Technological change means an increasing number of occupations require at least some basic computer skills. For example, think of the last time you shopped for groceries, did some banking, serviced your car or went out to a restaurant. In most cases, people working in these businesses use a computer at some point to do their work. Computers are only one example of technological change. Recent trends include growing use of hand-held information and communication tools including cellular telephones.

How does being familiar with technological change help you make decisions about your future?

- No matter what occupation you choose, developing your computer skills is sure to be an asset. Computer skills are also transferable. You can move from one occupation to another with these skills.
- If you have an interest in working with technology, there are many occupational options: sales, repair and maintenance, developing new technology or new applications for existing technology, and training others on how to use technology.

Globalization

Globalization means companies can operate all over the world and around the clock because of improvements in technology. One labour market outcome of this trend is a growth in the development of call centres, resulting in more job openings for this type of work. For example, one company recently established a large Edmonton-based call centre to serve its North American customers.

How does understanding the impact of globalization help you to make decisions about your future? Consider the opportunities that globalization creates:

- Companies require employees who speak more than one language and who can travel.
- Companies require employees to work flexible hours to serve the needs of those customers in other time zones.
- Small companies can sell their products all over the world through the Internet.

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Cora-Lee is an Edmonton-based business analyst/project manager for a Canadian information and communication technology company. She works with hospitals to help them manage their information. She has had jobs in Alberta, British Columbia, Australia and New Zealand. At one point, she travelled to different work sites in North America 48 out of 52 weeks a year. She knows how technological change is affecting the demand for skills in her area.

"One thing we are seeing in the information and communication technology sector is the movement away from hiring people who are strictly technically focused. We're looking for people who have some technical knowledge but have a lot more business experience. What will make any information technology implementation work are people management skills."

General economy of Alberta and Canada

General knowledge of the local and national economy is important labour market information because changes to what is happening now can have an important impact on your career plans. Ask yourself:

- Is the economy going through a growth phase or are a lot of people being laid off?
- How does the Alberta economy and labour market compare to the rest of Canada, and will that likely change in future?

The amount of activity in the Alberta economy has been about the same for the past 10 years. Because Alberta is largely a resource-based province, the price of oil and gas as well as the value of the Canadian dollar has a major influence on both the Alberta and Canadian economy. The Alberta government predicts that the average price of oil will rise to $25 US per barrel by 2006 and the value of the Canadian dollar will remain low compared to the American dollar. This makes Canadian exports to the United States cheaper for Americans and, because Alberta is largely an exporting province, this is good news for the provincial economy.

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Right now, these general economic conditions mean:

Low unemployment

- In 2002, the annual average unemployment rate in Alberta was 5.3 per cent, one of the lowest unemployment rates in Canada.

Many construction projects

- In 2002, there were $88.6 billion worth of major construction investment projects on the books. Almost $57 billion were slated for the oil, gas, and oilsands sector, followed by infrastructure at $7.0 billion, power at $6.6 billion, institutional at $4.3 billion and tourism and recreation at $3.1 billion.

  (Source: Alberta Economic Development, December 2002, Highlights)

This suggests there are many opportunities for tradespeople, especially as the impact of the baby boomer retirement increases.

Industry/sector activity

There are 19 major industries in Alberta. For more information on their outlook over the next few years check out the publication *Alberta Careers Update*. Pick up a copy at your local Alberta Human Resources and Employment service centre, or order or view on-line at the ALIS website, **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop**

Below are some questions to consider when reading about industry or sector activity:

- Which industries or sectors are experiencing the most growth?
- Will that level of activity likely continue?
- How will this level of activity impact the demand for goods and services?
- What does this mean for job availability?

Labour market trends

The combined effects of demographics, technological change, globalization and economic activity result in labour market trends. One example of a trend in the Alberta economy is the movement from goods-producing industries (oil, forestry, and mining) to service industries, leading to a more diversified economy.

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When you have identified a trend, ask yourself the following questions:

How could this trend affect me?
We sometimes read and hear that service industries are growing faster than goods-producing industries. If you have worked in a goods-producing industry most of your life, this trend may or may not have a huge impact on your job search. You need more information to figure out how a general trend like this one might affect you personally in the long run.

What opportunities might this trend create?
Service industries include such occupations as accommodation and food services, communications, educational services, finance, insurance and real estate, as well as repair and maintenance services. You may recognize a service industry where you can transfer the skills you developed while working in a goods-producing industry.

Are there exceptions to the trend?
Before you jump to any conclusions, look for other sources of information to help you confirm or dispute this trend. For example, are there some goods-producing industries that are growing at the same pace or faster than service industries?

What other factors will affect future employment prospects in different industries?
Industry size and employee turnover rate (rate of people leaving existing positions) are just as important as industry growth in determining the number of employment openings there will be. For instance, the retail trade industry is not growing as quickly as information and communication technology but there are often more job openings in the retail industry. That's because the retail industry is much larger than the information and communication technology industry and some types of work in the retail industry have high employee turnover rates.

Is it a fad or is it a trend?
A fad is a labour market trend that comes and goes quickly. A recent example would be the number of dot-com companies. Many of these companies disappeared when consumers lost confidence in dot-com enterprises.

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Key occupational needs and requirements

Once you have identified a trend, you may need to find out more about the jobs it may create. This, too, is labour market information.

Learn about the duties, working conditions, salary expectations and educational requirements for over 500 occupations on *OCCINFO*. To access this information click on the ALIS website at **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/occinfo**

What should you consider when evaluating occupations that are right for you?

- What is involved in a typical day on the job (duties, nature of work and working conditions)?
- What level of education is needed for me to enter my chosen occupation?
- Where is training offered?
- How will my level of education affect my occupational choices?
- How much can I expect to earn?
- What is the future outlook for this occupation?

Now that you know the range of labour market information that is particularly useful, lets look at where to find it.

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Sources

There are many labour market information sources. They fit into three broad categories:

- verbal or networking
- print
- audio, video and electronic, including the Internet.

While you should never reject any labour market information sources, plan how to make the job of gathering and making sense of labour market information as easy as possible. Ask yourself these questions:

- How easily can I access the sources? Most public libraries have a lot of newspapers and often provide computer access to the Internet.
- Which labour market information sources am I most comfortable using? Do I enjoy surfing websites? Or do I prefer to read a newspaper? Am I more comfortable gathering labour market information from television sources?
- Is the information easy to understand?
- Does this source have detailed information that is of specific interest to me? For example, Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE) provides detailed profiles on hundreds of occupations. You can view *OCCINFO* at your local AHRE service centre as well as on the ALIS website at **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/occinfo**
- Is the source reliable?

It's a good idea to use a variety of sources before making a decision. For example, after hearing something related to labour market information on the news, go to the Internet to dig up more facts, and then talk to people to confirm that what you've heard could apply to your local situation.

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Labour market information in verbal form or networking

Personal contact and conversation is a popular way of gathering labour market information. Sometimes people call this "networking". Just as a television company uses a number of "network" stations located in various communities to broadcast its programs, you can build a network of people who can alert you to job opportunities and training requirements for specific occupations. This type of labour market information gathering includes:

- talking to people who work in your areas of interest
- communicating your needs with family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, and casual acquaintances.

Ask these people if they know of anyone you might speak with, if they know of any published information, or if they have suggestions for sources of information. Most people enjoy talking about their work and are happy to share their wisdom and experience.

There are a number of ways to connect with individuals who can provide you with specific labour market information. For example, think of attending:

- trade shows
- conferences
- seminars.

The Internet also hosts forums about jobs and industries. Here, people in the same job or industry gather to ask questions, chat, and exchange ideas. They are frequently open to questions from people wanting to know more about their work, educational background, and trends within their specific industry. They may also suggest someone locally that you can talk to for more information.

Gathering labour market information through personal contact will also help you verify a lot of the information you may have gathered from other information sources. If you talk to experts in a particular occupation, they will often tell you immediately if you are on the right track and usually can provide you with real life stories and examples.

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Labour market information in print form

Newspapers and Magazines

Newspapers and magazines are common labour market information sources and are widely available. Buying them ensures that you get the latest information. Libraries are also a good source of newspapers and magazines. Librarians are trained to help you find information, so they can help support your labour market information gathering efforts.

Newspapers

News

News articles near the front of the newspaper, sometimes called "hard news", will tend to answer the questions who, what, where, and when. Middle section or "feature" articles will tend to answer the question why. A good way to select the articles that could provide you with both general and specific labour market information is to scan the headlines. Also, skim specific sections such as the careers section published in daily newspapers for articles about career planning. Other sections, like the business section, give information about economic, industry and business trends.

For example, here is an article that appeared in the business section of the Edmonton Journal on November 29, 2002.

ALBERTA AGRICULTURE HELPS TRAIN FOOD WORKERS

EDMONTON / Alberta Agriculture is spending $3 million during the next three years to train skilled workers for the food processing industry.

The initiative will provide up to half of eligible costs (to a maximum of $50,000 per year) to participating companies engaged in workplace training projects. A government and industry advisory committee will monitor program design and implementation.

"Alberta's food processing sector currently employs 23,000 people," said Agriculture Minister Shirley McClellan. "We anticipate, over the next five years, that an additional 18,000 new employees are needed."

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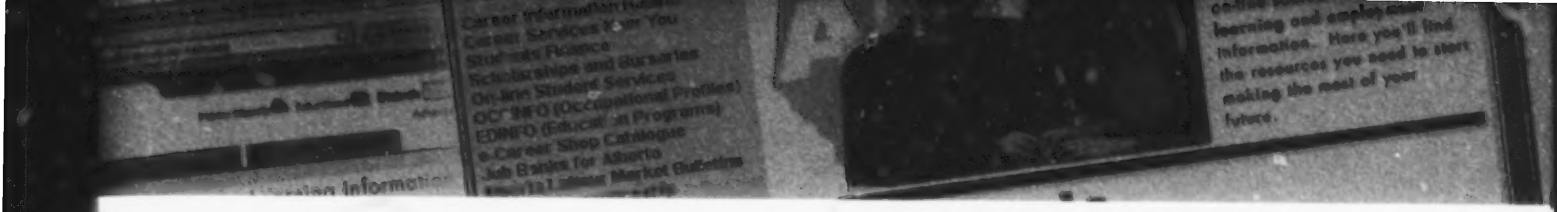

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This article has several clues about the labour market. You may not know much about the food processing industry, but from this information it looks like there will be a demand for workers. You could research further based on the information from this news article.

Here are some examples of questions. What types of occupations are found in the food processing industry? What salaries are paid? What type of basic training or skills would I need to qualify for an entry-level position? Who are some employers in my area that are in the food processing industry? What types of skills are they looking for? Can you think of any other questions?

Advertisements

Scanning advertisements is a good starting point for gathering labour market information. Advertisements, both classified ads and ads throughout the rest of the paper, tell you which companies are hiring and what occupations are in demand. Their wording and appearance may tell you something of the culture and values of the companies looking for employees. The sheer number of ads for particular occupations can give you a good idea about skill shortages. Note the lists of skills and abilities in demand. Are there some skills or abilities that cross over from one industry to another? Are particular qualifications, education or experience requested? You may notice a shift or change in the skills or abilities required if you survey the ads regularly. You may also recognize skills that you can transfer from one occupation to another, which may introduce you to areas you hadn't considered before.

Magazines

Like newspapers, magazines are another well-known source of labour market information. They also contain news and advertisements. Generally speaking, however, magazines tend to have more feature-type news and display ads. There are two types of magazines—general interest and trade magazines.

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General interest magazines
Although there are plenty of career-building articles printed in general interest magazines, topics are covered in a more general way so that a lot of people will get something from the article. Therefore, general interest magazines might not be as applicable to your local labour market situation. Trade magazines give more specific information.

Trade magazines
These are magazines published for specific industries and occupations. Articles and advertising are aimed at the organizations and people who work in these industries. For example, the oil, hospitality and agriculture industries are each served by several trade magazines.

To find trade publications in your area of interest, look in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* at your local library. Check out your subject area for articles and note the magazines in which they are published. Show the list of articles to your librarian and ask if any of these magazines are available at the library.

Because trade magazines appeal to a specific audience, it is sometimes more difficult to find copies of them. Businesses and associations related to a specific industry or business in your community are often the best source for back copies of specific trade magazines.

Books
Non-fiction books are also well known labour market information sources. Books give more detailed information compared to newspapers and magazines. Many relate to the work environment, career planning, as well as business and industry trends. Some authors look at trends in society and the workplace and then attempt to predict the future outlook. It is worthwhile to check on the inside front cover for the year when the book was printed to ensure the information is current.

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Industry/labour market reports and government publications

Union, association, municipal and Chambers of Commerce

If available in your community, these offices are good sources of specific labour market information. Union and association offices prepare reports that predict employment needs for specific occupations, wage levels, and working conditions. Municipal offices print information that shows opportunities for local economic development. Chambers of Commerce often provide information that gives a snapshot of the current business climate, as well as business and job opportunities. Sometimes these groups provide one point of view, which may not provide enough information for you to form a complete picture. So check the information gathered from these sources against other sources.

Public library depository

Many libraries have been designated "depository" libraries. They receive copies of publications produced by publicly funded departments, agencies, boards, commissions and groups. Generally, larger public libraries and larger educational institution libraries have been designated as depository libraries. If you are looking for a special study, document or report produced by a publicly funded group, you should be able to find it in one of the depository libraries in the province. A phone call to your local library to ask where the depositories are in your area is a good start. Once you have established a location, the resource librarians at the centre can explain how to use the system to your advantage.

Federal government through specific departments

Federal government departments prepare public documents related to their areas of interest and responsibility on a regular basis.

Provincial government through specific departments or Alberta Human Resources and Employment service centres

Provincial government departments also prepare public documents related to their areas of interest and responsibility on a regular basis. Furthermore, Alberta Human Resources and Employment produces a publication called the *CareerShop*, which includes a complete list of its career development resources. While these resources are valuable on their own, noting the types of publications produced by the department is in itself valuable labour market information.

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The public affairs and communications offices of federal and provincial government departments can also help you track down information from government sources.

Billboards and benches

The tone, content, and frequency of messages on billboards and benches can be a source of labour market information. At certain times of the year, both public and private educational institutions will launch billboard and bench advertising campaigns promoting their ability to provide either general or specific types of training and education programs. What types of specific training is being offered?

Also, take note of the types of businesses using billboards and display advertising. What types of businesses most frequently use this type of advertising and which demographic audience are they targeting with their message? Has that target audience changed over time? This form of advertising also provides clues on development of new technology. How could this technology change labour demand in future and impact on the skills that workers should have?

Labour market information in audio, video and electronic form, including the Internet

Radio

Before television, radio had an edge over print sources because it could provide instant information and reach a large audience. Today, because many radio stations have informational programming and talk shows aimed at specific audiences, this type of programming can be a source of labour market information.

Television

For many, television is their most important source of information and entertainment. Television is an exceptional source of labour market information because it has a huge variety of programming.

There are a number of sources of labour market information on television. A few suggested starting points are news broadcasts, talk shows, specialty programming and entertainment programming.

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The public affairs and communications offices of federal and provincial government departments can also help you track down information from government sources.

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Try This: Get a copy of the weekly television guide, usually available on Friday from your local daily newspaper. Quickly scan the programming and circle all the potential labour market information sources. Focus on those that may relate to your career interests. Identify five potential labour market information sources and include them in your regular weekly viewing schedule. Add a new one each week for two months, then evaluate the information you have gathered about current labour market activity and what may be in demand in the future labour market.

The Internet

The Internet offers a lot of labour market information for people with basic computer skills and with access to a computer and the Internet. Libraries and Alberta Human Resources and Employment service centres frequently offer Internet access at no charge.

Here are a few cautions about the volume and quality of information provided over the Internet.

- It is important that you gather labour market information from reputable Internet sources. Not all sites are from reliable sources.
- It would be wise to start with a few reputable sources then expand your search, rather than launching a massive search right off the bat. That way, you can pick and choose quality labour market information sources as you go and manage the information without feeling overwhelmed.
- Also use labour market information related to Alberta or Canada, rather than other provinces or countries.

A number of common sources of labour market information, such as newspapers, radio stations, television stations, businesses, industry associations, unions, employee associations, book publishers, book sellers and government departments now operate websites that can be accessed through the Internet.

How do I find quality labour market information sources on the Internet?

The Internet operates a lot like the postal system. Every website has an address.

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INFORMATION: ALIS has labour market information at www.alis.gov.ab.ca Labour market information is the

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Using a search engine

The easiest way to find an address is to use a search engine. A search engine is an Internet tool that allows you to find an address or information source by typing in key words in the search engine box located at a provider's website. Some common search engine websites are **www.google.ca**, **www.yahoo.ca**, **www.netscape.com** and **www.msn.com**. Each of these sites provides a Help Menu that gives step-by-step instructions on how to use its search engine. The best advice is to experiment and learn how to use a search engine effectively. It is also possible to conduct a search for search engine sites. Some search engines only search sites within a specific category. For example, **www.collmi.org** is a Canadian career and labour market information search engine.

What is a FAQ?

Many sites have a FAQ link. FAQ stands for 'Frequently Asked Questions' and is an important information tool on websites. If you need assistance using a search engine or about a website in general, common questions are frequently answered here.

Using links

Many websites link to other related websites. This means that by clicking on key highlighted words or addresses on one website, you will automatically be connected to a related website. Starting with a single reputable source then connecting to its links is often all you need to gather enough labour market information to satisfy your needs.

The Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website—a great place to start

A big timesaver in gathering and making sense of labour market information is to tap into a resource that provides local information. The ALIS website is just such a resource. Access it by typing in **www.alis.gov.ab.ca** The site offers general and specific information. For example, it provides:

- information from the Alberta Career Information Hotline, which you can also access directly by dialing 1-800-661-3753 toll-free, in Alberta or 422-4266, in Edmonton
- hundreds of occupational profiles under *OCCINFO*
- the location of an Alberta Human Resources and Employment service centre near you. Another way to find a location is by dialing 310-0000 toll-free in Alberta.

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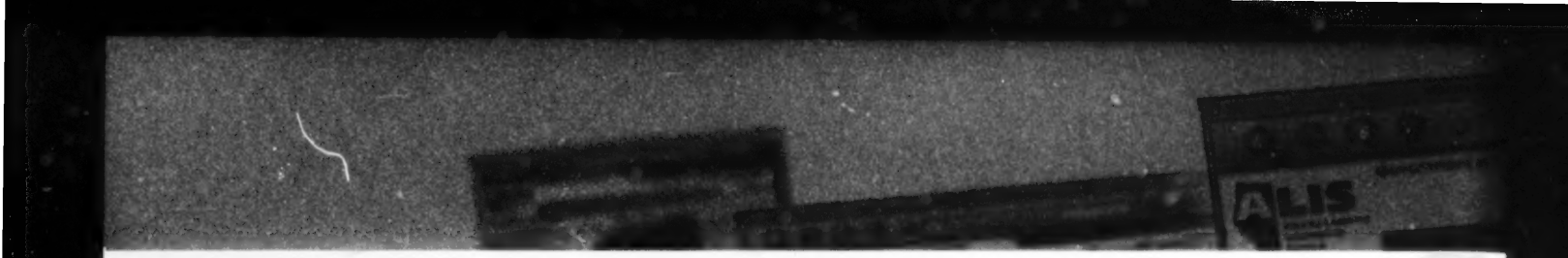

For easy navigation, the ALIS website is divided into three specific categories: Career, Learning, and Employment. You will find Labour Market Information under Employment.

There is also an internal search engine on ALIS that can provide you with a quick listing of all related topics on the website pertaining to your specific area of interest.

Compact discs

The main advantage that compact discs have over audio and video cassette tapes is that when inserted into a computer, many compact disc computer programs allow you to interact with the program. The compact disk has become an advanced training tool in many institutions and businesses. Demonstrating your need to develop basic computer skills to access more advanced learning and training tools is in itself a labour market information trend. Having access to a computer and using compact discs solves the problem of mobility for many people, as the training can often occur in their own homes. Compact discs are readily available from computer software stores and sometimes on loan from libraries.

Digital video discs (DVD) and video cassettes

The digital video disc is a relatively new technology and is replacing video cassettes. Much of the information available on video cassettes is now offered in digital video disc format as well.

Did you know? Labour Market Information Centres in Alberta offer an extensive library of books, magazines, software, and audio and video materials to help people make informed career decisions. They include information on career planning, labour market trends, industry profiles, occupations, education and training programs, funding, and finding work. See the Resource section at the end of this book for more information on locating the office closest to you.

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Tips for Using Labour Market Information

Ask questions. Asking one question will often lead to other questions and move your research ahead. For example, if the labour market information you have gathered discusses themes in a general way, ask questions like:

- How will this general trend impact the local economy?
- What opportunities might be created as a result?

If an author is making a prediction, ask yourself:

- What are they basing their prediction on?
- Have they missed any important information that would have changed their prediction?
- Is it clear how they got from the present to the future?
- Are their predictions believable?
- Do they have an interest that might have biased their prediction (e.g. company websites that are often designed to attract investors)?

Information changes fast. Keep looking for facts and choose your sources carefully for up-to-date answers. Check the date of the information to see if it is current. Double-check the time references made in the labour market information. General time frames like "in the next few decades" and "in the future" may not be much help to your planning efforts.

Consult many labour market information sources. Some sources will provide very general pieces of information. Therefore, you may need to consult other sources to clarify how that labour market information relates to your local area or your particular situation.

Check whether the source is Canadian or American. American information may not be relevant to the local economy.

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Know the difference between occupation versus industry information.

- Occupations involve skills and abilities needed for a particular type of work.
- One occupation may be found in many industries. For example, occupations like sales representatives and personnel managers are found in many industries.

Compare information from many different sources. See if they agree. Check to see if the information only presents one point of view. Talk to people employed in the field. Compare what they tell you with information provided by education and training centres.

How reliable is the source? When you review labour market information from different sources, is it slanted one way or another? Information can be presented in such a way as to benefit an organization, political cause, or some other agenda. Consider the reasons behind how the information is presented. Is it to sell seats in a training program? Has it been developed to attract investors? These are good reasons to seek out various sources and verify what you gather. Always question the reliability of the source, its motivation, where the information came from and how the conclusions were reached.

How credible is the source? For example, information provided on an Alberta Human Resources and Employment website is likely to be more credible than an advertisement urging you to apply today because, "1000 new jobs have just become available. Work from the comfort of your own home."

Understand the salary information. Sometimes salary information can be too general to be useful. Factors such as job location or the nature of the work may have an impact on the rate of pay. For example, whether the work is seasonal or full-time will have an impact on salary. Developing sectors may be in a state of flux, offering higher salaries when there is a skill shortage and then level off as more skilled labour becomes available. High technology fields like web design is a good example of this outcome. Also consider regional differences. For example, you could make $15/hour making sandwiches in a "boom" town. To decide whether or not that is a good wage, you need to consider such things as that community's cost of living and the availability of reasonably priced housing.

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Interpret statistics carefully. Say you were presented with statistical information indicating an increase in job availability for each of these occupations. At first glance, which occupation do you think has more job openings?

- Physiotherapists—increase of 150 per cent
- Plumbers—increase of 10 per cent

Let's consider, however, the size of each occupation. If there are only 30 physiotherapists in your community, then a 150 per cent increase means that 45 new jobs will be available. If there are 2000 plumbers in your community, then a 10 per cent increase means 200 more jobs. Which occupation actually offered more potential jobs?

Always check how a list was produced. Top 100 lists or lists of industry by size are often based on revenue rather than employment. Here is an example where revenue and employment have no connection. Publicly funded organizations such as government and education are considered not-for-profit and would not make a Top 100 list based on revenue. Yet they can be the largest employers in some communities.

Verify the locations of some specialized jobs. Industry growth or openings may be located in another city, province or country.

Plan ahead. If you are interested in an advancement in position or income, read labour market information based on where you plan to be in a few years, not just today. Look for the typical career path that an occupation follows. For example, learning to operate a skidder in the logging industry can lead to operating a more advanced feller buncher, to a harvester-processor, then result in a promotion to crew chief because of your knowledge of how to operate and maintain logging equipment.

Keep an open mind while researching. Don't be so critical of potential labour market information sources that you end up questioning everything and not gathering any labour market information. Even labour market information with shortcomings may have some useful nuggets of information. It may also lead you in a new direction.

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Keep in touch with what is going on around you, even after you've made your decision and are working in your dream job. Reading the signs will help you continue to make positive decisions for your future.

- Keep up-to-date with trends that influence your work.
- Know who your employer's major competitors are.
- Watch the news to be aware of overall shifts in the economy.
- Stay informed.

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Resources

Are you looking for more labour market information on career planning, researching education and training options, or are you looking for work?

Visit the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) website at **www.alis.gov.ab.ca** ALIS is Alberta's on-line source for career, learning and employment information. You'll find the resources you need for making the most of your future.

- Check out **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/occinfo** for over 500 occupational profiles. Get all the details from duties, working conditions, salary and advancement opportunities to personal characteristics and educational qualifications.
- Click on Alberta Labour Market Bulletins from the ALIS home page to get to Alberta's local labour market bulletins and links to further Alberta- and Canada-wide labour market information.
- You'll also find print, audio and video career and workplace-related resources. Visit **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/careershop** for more information or to view on-line. You can also view or pick up copies at any Alberta Human Resources and Employment service centre. Many of the publications are available free of charge to Alberta and NWT residents.

Contact the Alberta Career Information Hotline for answers to your labour market information questions about:

- career planning
- occupations
- job search skills
- education and training options
- information and referrals.

Phone: 1-800-661-3753 toll-free in Alberta
Phone: (780) 422-4266 in Edmonton
Access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing: 1-800-232-7215 for message relay service or (780) 422-5283 for TDD service
E-mail: hotline@alis.gov.ab.ca
Website: **www.alis.gov.ab.ca/hotline**

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Alberta Human Resources and Employment

Alberta Human Resources and Employment service centres are located throughout the province. They have information on occupations, career options, education programs and funding, and finding work. Many offices have a Labour Market Information Centre with books, newspapers, magazines, and software and audio/visual materials. They also may have computers for Internet use and word processing, and phones and fax machines to use with your work search. You can also talk to a career and employment consultant. These services may be offered by other agencies in your community. Call the Alberta Career Information Hotline for the office closest to you. You can also check out the Alberta Human Resources and Employment website for more information about the department's programs and services at **www.gov.ab.ca/hre**

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Other useful websites

Alberta Economic Development (www.alberta-canada.com)
Helping Alberta business to succeed in the global economy. This site offers information on the Alberta economy, industries, products, and many links to other related information.

The Alberta Library Online (TAL) (http://talonline.ca)
Through the TAL Online catalogue Albertans can search the catalogues of public, post-secondary and special libraries in Alberta. Library catalogues can be searched separately or several can be searched all at once to find books, videos and other materials located in Alberta's libraries.

Alliance of Sector Councils (www.councils.org)
The co-ordinating body of approximately 26 sector councils. Sector councils bring together representatives from business, labour, education, and other professional groups in a neutral forum in order to comprehensively and cooperatively analyze and address sector-wide human resource issues. This site allows you to search for specific sector councils by name or by activity.

Government of Canada (www.canada.gc.ca)
You'll find links to national information such as:

- Industry Canada
- Statistics Canada

Career, Occupational, Learning and Labour Market Information search engine (www.collmi.org)
This search engine will find labour market information from sites across Canada.

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Feedback

We'd Like to Hear From You...

Making Sense of Labour Market Information

Date:

Did you find the information in this publication useful?
In what way?

_____

_____

_____

How could we improve it?

_____

_____

_____

Do you have any suggestions for other products that would be of value to you?

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Would You Like to Receive a Catalogue of Our Products?

Name _____

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_____ Postal Code _____

Phone _____ FAX _____

Please Return this Form to

People, Skills and Workplace Resources
Alberta Human Resources and Employment
12th floor, 10030 - 107 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 3E4
Fax: 780-422-5319

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Explore your options on-line for Career, Learning and Employment information

www.alis.gov.ab.ca

- Career planning
- Education and training
- Occupational information
- Students finance
- Scholarships
- Job postings

Alberta
HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT
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More skilled workers needed
This area is looking at layoffs
Industries that are growing
Opportunity is knocking – Are you going to answer?
It makes good business sense
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